

Agricultural Commission Meeting

**May 11, 2010
Bangs Community Center**

Minutes

Members Present: Sally Fitz, Ruth Hazzard, Jaime Tidlund, Pat Wagner, Wm Levine, John Thibbits, Richard Roznoy (non-voting planning board rep)

Members Absent: Touria Eaton

Non-Members Present: Diana Stein (select board) David Ziomek (staff liaison) and Jeremy Barker-Plotkin (potential member)

Minutes: March, (including Kelly's), April and May minutes need to be reviewed and approved.

Background regarding work plan process:

The Amherst Agricultural Commission used the Handbook for Agricultural Commissions, created by the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR) in June 2005, to guide the process of developing the Commission's goals and priorities. The work plan document is available via this link: <http://www.mass.gov/agr/agcom/docs/handbook/PDF/handbook-for-agricultural-Commissions-full-Doc.pdf>

As stated in the Handbook,

“Creating a work plan is an effort to produce decisions and actions that shape and guide what the organization is, what it does, and why it does it, with a focus on the future. The work plan is the road map the AgCom can use to meet its charge. It is a tool and a guide, but it is not a substitute for the exercise of judgment by leadership and membership. The AgCom will need to sit back from time to time and ask, and answer, ‘What are the most important issues?’ and ‘How shall we respond?’ Responses to these questions should be used to update the work plan to make sure it is timely and relevant.” (p. 11)

The Amherst Agricultural Commission began its work plan process at its April, 2010 meeting. At that meeting, a list of approximately 30 goals and activities were generated by the group. At the end of the meeting, the group realized that many of those items were related and could be grouped into a smaller number of overarching goals/areas of focus. Jaime Tidland took the list of 30 items and created a proposed list of 6 overarching goals/areas of focus.

Continuation of the work plan process at the current meeting:

At this meeting, the Ag Com continued its work plan process. We discussed the groupings and, after minor revisions, created the list that appears below. Then, in order to prioritize the list so we could narrow our focus for this year, we used a ranking process outlined in the MDAR Handbook for Agricultural Commissions. Here is an excerpt from that handbook, describing the ranking process:

“Suggested scoring method:

Approved at the July 13, 2010 Agricultural Commission meeting.

Each person receives nine Post-it notes
Three Post-its are marked with the number 10
Three Post-its are marked with the number 5
Three Post-its are marked with the number 1

Post-its with the number 10 are placed on the three issues they think are most important
Post-its with the number 5 are placed on the next most important
Post-its with the number 1 are placed on the next most important

6. Prioritize issues: Add up the numbers for each issue and review in order
Those issues receiving the highest scores rank as most important issues.
List the issues as ranked: highest score = highest priority issue.” (p. 12)

Because we only had 6 possible goals to rank, we modified the above approach by providing each member with only 6 post-it notes (2 10's, 2 5's, 2 1's). Higher numbers represent higher priorities. The scores appear under each goal below.

Development of subcommittees:

In April, the group discussed using subcommittees as a way to (a) increase the productivity of the group without overburdening members; and (b) include community members in Agricultural Commission projects and activities. Again quoting the MDAR Handbook for Agricultural Commissions, “Remember, the workload of AgCom members can be lightened by organizing subcommittees to plan and take action, by utilizing ‘friends’ who are interested in the AgCom and willing to volunteer, and by focusing on one or two issues at a time.” (p. 8)

At the present meeting, members volunteered to be in charge of at least one subcommittee. Those names appear next to each goal below. Members agreed to meet with their subcommittee co-chairs prior to the June meeting and come up with a list of specific action items for the June, 2010-June, 2011 year.

Below lists the overarching goals/areas of focus from which we derived our priorities for this year and subcommittee volunteers. The group agreed that all of these issues are important for Amherst Agricultural Commission and that all goals will be addressed by the commission in future years and/or as the need arises.

A. Communication (Jeremy, Wm, Jaime)

(ranking scores: 5,10,1,5,10,1)

- Farmers (newsletters, speaker services to farmers)
- Ag Com to Farmers
- Farmers to resources (e.g. , labor, young people, new farmers)

B. Marketing/Community Awareness of local Ag (Jaime, John)

(ranking scores: 1,10,10,5,1)

- Encourage business to support local ag
- Community events

- Promote economic development in town
- Develop ag product guide/ farm maps

C. Education (Sally, Ruth)

(ranking scores: 5,5,1,10,5,10,5,5,5,5,)

- Farmers (e.g., labor, health care)
- The public (e.g., community gardens)
- School Kids

D. Collaboration/Relationships with government/private sector (not assigned)

(ranking scores: 1,1,1,10,1)

- Full conservation commission
- Develop partnerships with groups (e.g. CISA)
- Strengthen links with other boards
- Increase awareness of the Ag Com in town boards

E. Farmers Market Issues (Jeremy, Wm, Ruth)

(ranking scores: 5,10,1,1,10,5)

- Help organize a winter market
- Reform Saturday Market
- Year-round market
- Cold storage

F. Preservation and use of farmland (Pat, Wm, Jeremy)

(ranking scores: 1, 10, 10, 10, 5)

- Preservation of farmland, open space, conservation land, recreation
- Classification of town owned lands
- Wetlands encroaching
- Water/ sewer charges

Town Meeting: David went through the town meeting articles that may be of interest to the Ag Com. Richard passed on some information about Article # 25. We discussed the Ag Com's role in land issues, do we advocate for farmers or the land, or is it case by case. No position was taken by the Ag Com on any warrant article.

David also spoke about the Hawthorne property and said that it will be going to recreational land and the farmhouse will be turned to low income housing. It is not prime soil and does not qualify for APR.

Respectfully submitted,

Jaime Tidlund